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21 during the ratings period -- the company  
22 marketing men can overrule the local  
23 journalist's judgment and summarily kill any  
24 story.

92 25 "Not that it was a bad story," wrote the

1 marketing chief in this internal memo, "just a  
2 story that wouldn't be broad enough to draw in  
3 a large amount of viewers in one that  
4 demonstrates your brand."

5 "Don't take offense," nearly two dozen  
6 news directors were told, "We're just trying to  
7 get the best stories for your station to  
8 market."

9 So at this station group, and others like  
10 it, who do you suppose is trying to get the  
11 best stories to serve the community, especially  
12 for those important issues that lack the flash  
13 and opportunity for self-promotion?

14 Bigger is not better.

15 And at this same Tampa television station  
16 and at other stations -- I assure you, I'm not  
17 picking on just this one -- pressure from  
18 corporate offices to increase profits have led  
19 to news directors being judged no longer  
20 primarily on the quality of the stations  
21 journalism, now we are scored 25 out of 100  
22 points for overall delivery of brand  
23 ambassadorship and defining moments and  
24 supporting the brand within reporter packages,  
93 25 15 points for presenting the anchorman's

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1 perspective, showing him or her as the radio  
2 station's brand ambassador at least once in  
3 every newscast.

4 They give bonus points for  
5 well-showcasing the station's talent, and they  
6 take away points whenever there's a significant  
7 missed opportunity to showcase the station's  
8 brand.

9 Now, nowhere on this score sheet that I  
10 obtained do news managers in this whole outfit  
11 get any points anymore for selecting relevant  
12 and important subjects, for journalistic  
13 enterprise or for good judgment. And nothing  
14 rewards accuracy and fairness.

15 At too many stations, now, we don't  
16 succeed anymore by being good journalists  
17 serving the viewer. We're brand ambassadors to  
18 help sell an image -- (Applause) -- largely  
19 unrelated to substance and the quality of our  
20 reporting. (Applause.)

21 Yes, journalists and their managers could  
22 take a stronger stand inside their own  
23 companies, but it doesn't -- seldom happens,  
24 because speaking up sometimes leaves you out.

25 And in closing, might I urge you and your

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1 staffs to seriously investigate these matters.  
2 If you're going to allow fewer and fewer to  
3 control more and more, please, honor your own  
4 obligation and duty to assure that these  
5 licensees are of sufficient character to

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6 control the airwaves.

7 When you're presented with evidence that  
8 a journalist was pressured to deliberately  
9 present false, distorted or slanted news and  
10 fired when they threatened to tell you about  
11 it -- as happened in my own case -- should it  
12 take years just for you to acknowledge that  
13 you're taking it seriously?

14 MR. SIGALOS: Thank you, sir.

15 MR. WILSON: Commissioners, bigger is not  
16 better, not better for public service or  
17 journalism. Thank very much. (Applause.)

18 MR. SIGALOS: Thank you very much, Mr.  
19 Wilson.

20 As we now transition to the  
21 public-comment period, I need to first  
22 recognize the following three individuals who  
23 were asked to speak for two minutes, at this  
24 point in the program, in order to keep the  
25 panel to a more manageable size.

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1 At this point could Congressman Jim Davis  
2 please come to the microphone. (Applause.)

3 CONGRESSMAN DAVIS: Commissioners, thank  
4 you for being here. Thanks for the chance to  
5 speak. I am not a congressman. I am a former  
6 congressman, and I'm here to speak as a  
7 citizen.

8 I spent eight years as a state official  
9 here, ten years as a congressman. I'm now  
10 practicing law with a law firm that does legal

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11 work for broadcasters, including Media General.

12 But I'm here today to express my own  
13 views and the same views I expressed in  
14 Congress. I oppose much of the relaxation of  
15 ownership limits that this commission proposed  
16 while I was in congress and actively fought for  
17 those personally and successfully as a number  
18 of the Energy and Commerce Committee.

19 As you have seen here in this room  
20 tonight -- I'm sure you've seen this all over  
21 the country -- there's a lot of people here  
22 because they don't think their voice is being  
23 heard.

24 There are a lot of people here who feel  
25 let down, because they do not think we have had

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1 an open-and-honest debate in this country about  
2 the Iraq war and many other major issues.

3 (Applause.)

4 You have heard of certain ideas about how  
5 to give more individuals the right to be heard.  
6 I am here tonight to tell you that I think that  
7 the cross-ownership here in this community has  
8 had some benefits.

9 I would strongly urge you to survey the  
10 many listeners and readers who will not have  
11 time to be here tonight. And I know you will  
12 listen to all the speakers.

13 But in my experience, since the  
14 conversion, I feel there has been more hard  
15 news, less entertainment -- not enough hard  
16 news for my taste, but still more -- in both

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17 quantity and quality in the news network that  
18 has experienced the conversion. I urge you to  
19 survey the viewers to find out for yourself.

20 Secondly, one of the things I think we  
21 can all agree upon here tonight is less people  
22 are reading the newspaper. I believe that you  
23 should consider the benefits in competitive  
24 markets like this, particularly, where we enjoy  
25 the benefit of the competition of ideas from

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1 dueling dailies to allow a newspaper to survive  
2 by combining it with a television station.

3 I think that is important to preserve the  
4 future of the newspaper industry. Because many  
5 of the issues we will be debating -- not just  
6 the issues you'll be debating -- do not fit  
7 into 30 seconds, do not even fit into a  
8 two-minute news broadcasts.

9 We want to preserve the written word and  
10 the creation of ideas that comes from competing  
11 newspapers and competing television and radio  
12 stations in communities like this. Thank you  
13 for the chance to be heard. (Applause.)

14 MR. SIGALOS: Thank you.

15 Monsignor Higgins.

16 MONSIGNOR HIGGINS: Well, I am not any  
17 great expert on any of these things. But I'd  
18 just like to say that I agree completely with,  
19 large just doesn't mean best.

20 I'd like things, basically, as far as  
21 possible to come from the bottom. I always

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98 22 remember the wisdom of one of the old people,  
23 when I was young, telling me this, that most of  
24 the big decisions in the church came from the  
25 bottom. But, of course, many times they were

1 not listened to.

2 But then I'd like to think that the local  
3 news, for example, is best handled by local  
4 people. They are the ones, for example, that  
5 know what's going on and that would know what's  
6 best for their community.

7 The bigger we get, the farther away we  
8 get from the center, and when we get away, the  
9 less we're going to get of our own local news.  
10 And it's very difficult, I know, in this day  
11 and age.

12 And I'm very concerned about the small  
13 person, the mom-and-pop stores disappearing.  
14 I'm very concerned, for example, that the  
15 little shops have disappeared, too, and that  
16 the richer become richer, and the poorer become  
17 poorer and that, basically, we have no  
18 mom-and-pops (sic) at all.

19 It concerns me greatly. Because I want  
20 people to want ownership, even though it may be  
21 a small thing. When you're talking to --  
22 you've dealt with -- (Inaudible) -- in some way  
23 and in dealing with your -- the newspapers, the  
24 local newspapers, all I can say is that I know  
99 25 that it's a very difficult question, but I

1 would ad to the members here that we have got  
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2 to, first of all, try and get our people back  
3 to reading again, because very few of them are.

4 That starts with our schools. We have to  
5 strive for them to even start reading the  
6 newspapers. Because they don't read, and if  
7 you don't read, well, that's that part taken  
8 care of.

9 And the second part that we have to try  
10 and do is that we put in the news, for example,  
11 was it newsworthy or news -- for example, the  
12 local news, that is -- the facts each and every  
13 one of us -- the news as best we can -- that's  
14 subjective.

15 And I know that it's a difficult one.  
16 But I know that you'll try and do your best,  
17 because democracy depends on the news in many  
18 ways. Because we depend on you -- time to get  
19 out to the public the different views, so that  
20 we can make up our minds and tell you what to  
21 do. (Applause.)

22 MR. SIGALOS: Thank you very much.

23 MONSIGNOR HIGGINS: Thank very much.

24 MR. SIGALOS: Mark Lunsford.

25 (No audible response.)

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1 MR. SIGALOS: Mark Lunsford.

2 (No audible response.)

3 MR. SIGALOS: All right. Now it's time  
4 for the public-comment period of our program.  
5 Before I review the ground rules, if you would  
6 please -- I'd like to call out the first

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7 names -- go to the nearest aisle microphone.

8 Greg Vawter, John Scott Duffy, Eric Land,  
9 Mark Adams and John Russell.

10 I would like to thank our panels very  
11 much for their participation. (Applause.)

12 All right. Just go to the nearest-aisle  
13 microphone. Okay. Here are the ground rules.  
14 Everybody sees the time clock. We have a  
15 two-minute time limit. We're going to follow  
16 that quite strictly.

17 We have many, many people who've signed  
18 up. Occasionally, I'll go over the number.  
19 Some of you may recall the number where you  
20 signed up, what order you were in. I'll go  
21 over that from time to time. Again, we have a  
22 two-microphones setup. This isn't --

23 A VOICE: Is there a break?

24 MR. SIGALOS: There is a break scheduled  
25 at 7:30. So, as much as we come towards that

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1 time period, you know, just so you have an  
2 idea that -- whether you might be speaking  
3 before or after the break, just wanted to give  
4 you a sense of that.

5 And we have -- our speakers just have one  
6 mike. You can -- just remember, I just want to  
7 bring you to the closest microphone. We'll go  
8 in order -- most obviously, the closest  
9 microphone.

10 A VOICE: -- call me by number?

11 MR. SIGALOS: Oh, from time to time, I'll  
12 call out the number. Right now I'm just going

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13 down names.

14 Greg Vawter. (Applause.)

15 MR. VAWTER: Thank you.

16 Commissioners, my name is Greg Vawter.

17 I'm a career public service television manager

18 (sic.) Through my work I've taught many

19 organizations and individuals to use media to

20 express themselves. I have also organized

21 productions for local schools and governments

22 and nonprofits.

23 And during my time here, I'll refer to

24 two ideas, commodities for sale and economies

25 of scale. Commodities for sale allow

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1 broadcasting to be profitable.

2 As you know, commercial stations

3 advertise. But the products they tout are not

4 the commodities of broadcasters, rather

5 viewers and listeners are the commodities.

6 The public's eyes and ears are sold to

7 advertisers. And while that fact is often

8 disturbing for citizens to hear, it's nothing

9 new.

10 But now the economies of scale are

11 driving large media conglomerates to gobble up

12 as many broadcasting outlets as the Commission

13 will allow. Consolidated companies operate at

14 less cost per unit than smaller outfits,

15 resulting in far greater profits for

16 shareholders.

17 But that's not so great for us citizens.

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18 We need differing perspectives on our TVs and  
19 radios and in our newspapers so we can make  
20 more informed decisions in our democracy.

21 We give the programmers their frequencies  
22 at no charge, so we and you as our  
23 representatives must not put their desire for  
24 profit above our need for diversity.

103 25 Please decide against allowing media

1 companies to consolidate their business  
2 interests at the expense of America's choices  
3 among differing voices. Instead of letting a  
4 few conglomerates buy even more local media  
5 choices, give us more options in the voices to  
6 which we can -- (Inaudible.) Thank you.

7 MR. SIGALOS: Thank you very much.

8 John Scott Duffey.

9 MR. DUFFY: My name is John Duffey. I  
10 was a broadcast news producer for 25 years  
11 until disabled by a heart attack.

12 I've spoken at FDA, FCC and other  
13 hearings only asking the government to put  
14 human interests ahead of corporate interests.  
15 And I feel like I'm largely ignored.

16 So, no more Mr. Nice Guy. Today I will  
17 demand: Quit relaxing broadcast news  
18 broadcast ownership rules. Roll them back and  
19 require more local control of our airwaves.

20 Two weeks ago tornadoes ripped across  
21 Tampa Bay. Clear Channel, the company owning  
22 a lot of radio stations in this town,  
23 broadcast a warning during its -- 9:00 a.m.

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104 24 and another one at 9:30 during their newscast  
25 on 97 WFLA, but nothing between them.

1 Even though Clear Channel promotes this  
2 station as the news leader, it failed to keep  
3 listeners updated for 25 minutes, the critical  
4 time this storm front passed through our  
5 community.

6 They were fusing (sic) up the Sunday  
7 morning policy (sic) programming and a  
8 constant stream of commercials, because they  
9 failed to provide adequate staff for coverage,  
10 even though this storm had already killed many  
11 people on the other side of the Gulf of  
12 Mexico, and anyone with half a brain knew a  
13 day earlier that we were going to get hit.

14 When I complained to the Clear Channel  
15 local boss, he said they planned to install  
16 robotic devices. They had a similar system  
17 online five years ago in Minot, North Dakota,  
18 where they've got a lot of radio stations.  
19 They cut labor costs.

20 They failed to alert people that a train  
21 loaded with toxic chemicals derailed in the  
22 middle of the night. The disaster killed one  
23 person and injured many more. To this day,  
24 Clear Channel still blames local law  
25 enforcement for their failure.

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1 Letting companies like these passes --  
2 takes us -- to control more and more channels,

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3 putting profits above public health and safety  
4 and you put lives at risk.

5 Please stop that now. You must require  
6 at least half of all broadcast licenses in  
7 every market to go to local interests, local  
8 control. Doing otherwise violates the public  
9 trust you've vowed to us. Thank you.

10 (Applause.)

11 MR. SIGALOS: Thank you. Eric Land.

12 MR. LAND: Good evening. I'm Eric Land,  
13 the chief operating officer of the Tampa Bay  
14 Buccaneers.

15 In my role I see firsthand how the  
16 combined operations of Media General, WFLA-TV,  
17 the Tampa Tribune and TBO.com are working  
18 together delivering more news to the area than  
19 they could have done alone.

20 If a Tampa Tribune reporter gets just a  
21 sports figure, she is just as likely to break  
22 the story on the air or online in the  
23 newspaper. And when that happens, I routinely  
24 see an in-depth follow-up the next day in the  
25 Tampa Tribune. Journalists take the position

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1 the story belongs to the public, not to a  
2 particular outlet.

3 I live in Tampa and care deeply about  
4 local government. Media General's properties  
5 have given a little more political coverage  
6 and hard-hitting investigative pieces than  
7 could ever be produced alone.

8 Tampa residents have come to rely on

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9 these three outlets, not only for analysis in  
10 truth in candidate statements and advertising,  
11 but as hosts for broadcast of debates of key  
12 races (sic.)

13 Before my year and a half in the NFL, I  
14 enjoyed a 32-year career in the TV industry,  
15 first as a TV reporter, ending as  
16 president/general manager at WFLA-TV, the  
17 Media General TV station here in Tampa.

18 I helped launch the new center. I have  
19 deep roots in the industry. My dad retired  
20 from a 56-year career overseeing newspaper, TV  
21 and radio cross-ownership operations in  
22 Gainesville, Ohio.

23 Media General and its local competitors  
24 have continued to be the voice for the  
25 voiceless and hold powerful accountable. In

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1 an age of relentless media competition, I've  
2 never seen efficiency be a replacement for  
3 integrity.

4 Media General and other newspaper  
5 companies put news first and foremost. Never  
6 in my 32 years with them did I ever witness a  
7 case where corporate headquarters dictated an  
8 editorial addendum, reporting or content.

9 Elimination of network compensation,  
10 indeed TV conversion expense and competition  
11 from unregulated media put incredible  
12 financial pressure to bear on TV stations and  
13 news operations. Don't handicap the very

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14 institutions who bring free speech to a free  
15 society.

16 Permitting companies who have owned  
17 heritage and deep commitment to own, jointly  
18 operate newspapers and stations in the same  
19 community in the best interests of the FCC --  
20 guarantee the future for local news in  
21 communities of all sizes (sic.)

22 MR. SIGALOS: Thank you.

23 MR. LAND: Thank you.

24 MR. SIGALOS: Mark Adams.

108 25 MR. ADAMS: My name is Mark Adams. The

1 FCC is required to act in the public interest,  
2 not in the interest of big business. A free  
3 flow of information -- (Applause) -- is  
4 necessary for our democracy to function.

5 This is why our founders protected  
6 freedom of speech and the press. They  
7 understood that the public needs to know what  
8 our government is doing. They knew only an  
9 informed public can make sure that we were  
10 protected from tyranny.

11 Yet the FCC is considering action that  
12 would allow for more media consolidation  
13 which, according to its own study, results in  
14 six-minutes less news per half-hour newscast.  
15 That's one-third less news coverage.

16 Already most people feel that our news  
17 media does a poor job covering our government.  
18 They realize -- (Applause) -- that the media  
19 does not cover issues thoroughly. And many

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20 know the media will cover up serious problems  
21 which the public should know about.

22 For example, I represent candidates  
23 challenging the official results of the 2006  
24 elections for four members of Congress and  
25 Florida's Governor. We had evidence showing

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1 that the official results took votes from  
2 Democratic and Independent candidates and gave  
3 them to Republicans. But there has been  
4 little coverage of this serious issue, even  
5 though there is abundant evidence that the  
6 official results produced by the secret  
7 vote-counting computers have not been accurate  
8 in the last few elections throughout our  
9 country. (Applause.)

10 There was little coverage -- (Applause)  
11 -- there was little coverage of the recent  
12 conviction of officials in Ohio for rigging  
13 the 2004 presidential election recount. If  
14 our media will not cover election fraud, then  
15 it's not interested in preserving our  
16 democracy.

17 A VOICE: You bet.

18 MR. ADAMS: Commissioners, do you want to  
19 be remembered as someone who further stifled  
20 the flow of information and undermined  
21 democracy or as someone would acted to  
22 preserve the will of the press in our  
23 democracy.

24 Thank you very much. Please choose

110 25

wisely. (Applause.)

1 MR. SIGALOS: Will the following  
2 people -- will the following people now please  
3 head to the microphone.

4 Brandy Doyle, Louise Thompson, Pat Burke,  
5 Jane Acre, Brad Ashwell and Donna Reed.

6 A VOICE: I just want --

7 MR. SIGALOS: Brandy Doyle, Louis  
8 Thompson -- sir?

9 A VOICE: -- supposed to hand out a copy  
10 of Aaron Russo's Americans for Freedom packet.  
11 They asked me to offer copies to --

12 MR. SIGALOS: Thank you very much, sir.  
13 (Applause.)

14 Again, Brandy Doyle, Louise Thompson, Pat  
15 Burke, Jane Acre, Brad Ashwell and Donna Reed,  
16 if you'd just come to the nearest microphone.

17 And now Mr. John Russell.

18 MR. RUSSELL. Thank you very much.

19 My name is John Russell. I'm one of  
20 those congressional candidates which is  
21 contesting the results of the election for  
22 2006 -- (Applause) -- here in Florida, one of  
23 the elections contests that you've not heard  
24 about (sic.)

111 25

As the introductory speaker said, the

1 public owns the airwaves, and the public wants  
2 them back. (Applause.) George Orwell --  
3 (Applause) -- George Orwell would roll over in  
4 his grave today if he were here to see what's

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5 going on.

6 We're going to a place in this country  
7 that we do not want to go, and it is a  
8 consolidation of the corporate news media that  
9 is going to take us there.

10 While efficiency is the rationale, one  
11 must look at it's not about quantity of news  
12 or news repeated endlessly over and over  
13 again, much of it just about entertainment or  
14 figures thereof, it is about the quality and  
15 objectivity of the information that is  
16 provided to the public so that they can make  
17 quality decisions when they talk about making  
18 decisions that are key to their life as well  
19 as politics.

20 And what I have for you here today is  
21 very cogent and must be considered. But when  
22 we talked about the Tribune and being  
23 grandfathered in, well, throughout the  
24 elections they used Survey USA as a poll that  
25 they pushed at least four times in the general

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1 election.

2 And this was a poll that was conducted  
3 using statistically irrelevant methodology.  
4 And while we conducted our own poll using  
5 Rastus in Research, which appears on the April  
6 10th front-page edition of the Tampa Tribune,  
7 Rastus in Research being in the 1 percent  
8 efficiency.

9 Survey USA is not even mentioned. I rest

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10 my case. They will not even cite their own  
11 poll when they talk about "Bad Lines, Dumb  
12 Society" or "Polls Get It Right."

13 Your own poll, Tampa Tribune did not get  
14 it right, and it was published in --  
15 (Inaudible) -- hurting people's right to know  
16 what is true and objective.

17 MR. SIGALOS: Thank you.

18 MR. RUSSELL: Thank you very much.

19 MR. SIGALOS: Brandy Doyle.

20 MS. DOYLE: As a correspondent for the  
21 Sarasota Harold Tribune, I'd like to talk to  
22 you about the state of the newsroom in a world  
23 of increasingly consolidated media ownership;  
24 however, I've never actually been inside the  
25 newsroom, except on the day my contract was

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1 signed.

2 With no real competition, dailies like  
3 the Harold Tribune cut corners by outsourcing  
4 much of their local news coverage to  
5 freelancers like myself.

6 I don't have a journalism degree or  
7 training as a professional journalist. I get  
8 no health insurance benefits or job security.  
9 I have little profession contact with others  
10 who work at the paper. I get no real feedback  
11 from my editor. And I've never been asked to  
12 write a second draft of a story.

13 In fact, I'm really discouraged from  
14 providing coverage that's too in-depth or  
15 controversial. I write for the community news

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16 page.

17 My colleague told me that it was bake off  
18 speed (sic.) But it's not just bake off, it's  
19 done cooked off -- (Inaudible) -- end up here,  
20 with the news section with stories which  
21 could've been developed into informative,  
22 meaningful pieces are relegated to the media  
23 equivalent of junk food (sic.)

24 When a community group organizes around a  
25 social issue, we usually cover it, but with

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1 photos of people standing around holding  
2 plaques, not with real research into the  
3 problems for our community.

4 I want to add, the Harold Tribune, which  
5 is a New York Times paper, is not a bad paper.  
6 But, unfortunately it's a typical one. While  
7 I can't speculate about the people who own  
8 newspapers and TV stations, at the editorial  
9 level, at least, I don't get the impression  
10 that most people are actively trying to  
11 squelch debate or suppress minority  
12 viewpoints.

13 The problem is that uncovering and  
14 investigating local issues just doesn't fit  
15 into business model of today's media outlets.  
16 With more consolidation it's only going to get  
17 worse.

18 Don't lift the caps on media ownership.  
19 The public interest isn't served by big  
20 conglomerates that treat local news as just

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21 another product to be made as cheaply as  
22 possible. Thank you.

23 MR. SIGALOS: Thank you.

24 (Applause.)

115 25 MR. SIGALOS: Louise Thompson.

1 MS. THOMPSON: I'm Louise Thompson. I'm  
2 the executive director of the local  
3 public-access channels for Tampa and  
4 Hillsborough County and the Greater Tampa Bay  
5 Community Network.

6 Although I've stayed there nine years,  
7 I've been working with a nonprofit group that  
8 took over those channels from the cable  
9 companies and have been fighting every step of  
10 the way to make sure that the public's voice is  
11 still available on the air.

12 There would be no big crowds coming there  
13 to the public access station if their voices  
14 were being heard elsewhere. I'm with a group  
15 that wanted to do civic and community  
16 journalism in the face of what's happening in  
17 the media.

18 With the largeness of the Tampa Tribune  
19 and other our places and the fact that they're  
20 interested, as they should be, in their  
21 corporate bottom line, there are less reporters  
22 available, less time for those reporters to be  
23 available to cover the kinds of issues that are  
24 important to us locally. There is no localism.

116 25 If it were not for the public access

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1 channels or the community radio station, WMNF,  
2 a lot of those issues would never, ever be  
3 covered in the corporate -- (Inaudible.)

4 People that come to us, musicians who  
5 cannot, because of Clear Channel's ownership  
6 of eight or nine channels here in our  
7 marketplace, cannot, like the musicians that I  
8 grew up with, go to their local radio station  
9 and get their music played.

10 And so the public access station, we play  
11 local musicians' music overnight on our  
12 community bulletin boards. Because they can't  
13 get coverage someplace else. We have voted in  
14 the darned wrong- -- wrongest people in the  
15 universe, because our reporters don't have  
16 time to investigate half of them. I mean, if  
17 the -- am I wrong here?

18 (Applause.)

19 We've voted, now, locally, nationally,  
20 we've got the worst people in -- are not --  
21 are not covered well enough, nor the missions  
22 of our environmentalists. Please keep the  
23 cap. (Applause.)

24 MR. SIGALOS: Pat Burke.

117 25 MS. BURKE: Thank you. Good evening

1 Commissioners. Well, my name is Patricia  
2 Burke. And for the past 23 years I've spent  
3 working for a local cable company as their  
4 government relations manager. I've also  
5 served for ten years in the third largest city

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6 in the Pinellas County as a local elected  
7 official.

8 Having said that, I am here tonight to  
9 say that I'm in opposition to any loosening of  
10 media ownership rules. (Applause.) I know  
11 how corporate works, and I have some idea of  
12 how government works. And knowing this, I can  
13 tell you, this is a very bad idea.

14 Corporate works for shareholders, and  
15 government works for the party. I am  
16 confident that you, as FCC members, will see  
17 this for what it is and not allow it to  
18 happen.

19 One of our most cherished freedoms is  
20 knowing that news is being reported honestly  
21 and without prejudice. A free press is  
22 necessary for democracy. With any loosening  
23 of these rules, this could change, and  
24 certainly not for the good of the people.

118 25 The public is way too smart to want this

1 change. And I thank you very much.

2 (Applause.)

3 MR. SIGALOS: Thank you.

4 Jane Acre.

5 MS. ACRE: Thank you Commissioners for  
6 being here. It's very important that you are  
7 here.

8 My name Jane Acre. I've been a broadcast  
9 journalist across the country for more than 20  
10 years including, most recently, here in Tampa.

11 As a medical reporter for Channel 10, I  
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12 was frequently approached by public-relations  
13 professionals and CEOs, trying to convince me  
14 that their latest product deserved news  
15 coverage. They were usually very persuasive.

16 When I hear from convergence supporters  
17 that sharing online radio and television  
18 newsrooms is a good thing, I have to disagree.  
19 Sharing one newsroom means that PR folks only  
20 have to pass their information through one set  
21 of eyes.

22 What if the product is defective?

23 What if the marketer is in it for a quick  
24 financial hit at the public's expense?

119 25 What if PR is selling a flawed public

1 policy?

2 It's one-stop shopping for the market;  
3 but for the public, fewer eyes means less  
4 scrutiny for the products and the news and  
5 information.

6 When I began as a radio news director in  
7 1978, part of the job was filing the FCC  
8 community ascertainment, which was a sort of  
9 checks and balances to make sure we were  
10 serving the public. That was then. Today  
11 there are no community ascertainment  
12 required; in fact, no news is required.

13 I believe the FCC should return to those  
14 tougher mandates and remind broadcasters the  
15 use of the airwaves is a special privilege.  
16 (Applause.) Traditional business models need

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17 not apply to something so vital to democracy.  
18 That is indecent.

19 And, Commissioners, you say the public  
20 can file a complaint. In January of 2005, my  
21 husband and I challenged the operating license  
22 of the Fox-owned station right here in Tampa.

23 We have proven in court that top ranks of  
24 management engaged in news distortion (sic.)  
25 Resisting them cost us our jobs. More than

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1 two years later we have yet to receive any  
2 response from the FCC on the status of that  
3 complaint. Meanwhile, the station continues  
4 to broadcast business as usual.

5 Chairman Martin, if you ask the public to  
6 help you regulate, do so. Work in the public  
7 interest by regulating this precious and  
8 limited commodity of the airwaves. Thank you.

9 (Applause.)

10 MR. SIGALOS: Thank you.

11 MR. ASHWELL: Hi. My name is Brad  
12 Ashwell, and I'm the consumer democracy  
13 advocate with the Florida Public Interest  
14 Research Group. We're a nonpartisan,  
15 statewide, nonprofit public interest advocacy  
16 group. We work on a number of different  
17 issues.

18 And before I go to any of them, I just  
19 want to thank you for coming. I can't express  
20 how important it is that you're here,  
21 exemplifying the importance and the gravity of  
22 these issues to the Tampa Bay Area and

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23 Florida, in general. So thank you.

24 And I'd also like to point out that, you  
25 know, due to the early nature of this meeting,

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1 a lot of people couldn't make here as early,  
2 because of the -- you know, it's a -- it's a  
3 Monday or it's a workday. But we expect more  
4 people to come as the night goes on. And we  
5 hope that you withhold any judgment or  
6 impressions of the Tampa media area until  
7 you've heard from everybody.

8 Now, as an advocate working on a lot of  
9 different issues, I look at the media almost  
10 every day. And they're, you know, extremely  
11 helpful. But one thing that increasingly  
12 surprises me is the fact that every time I  
13 talk to them they ask fewer and fewer  
14 investigative probing questions.

15 More and more, it just seems like sound  
16 bites really rule the day. If I don't have a  
17 good sound bite, I'm not going to get quoted,  
18 my message isn't going to get into the story.  
19 And that's the sad truth.

20 And I can't help but attribute this to  
21 the fact that media consolidation is leading  
22 to more streamlined and less staffing and less  
23 time to really focus on the stories and get  
24 behind their own people and to tell the truth.

25 I think we are going to find ourselves

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1 interject -- in injecting something that --